World Chronicle

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GUEST: **Sadako OGATA**
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

JOURNALISTS: Tuyet Nguyen, United Press International
Pat Orvis, *Christian Science Monitor*

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UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

SADAKO OGATA, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), discusses how her office now protects and assists more than 19 million refugees in addition to 20 million displaced persons around the world. According to Mrs. Ogata, both diplomatic and political initiatives are needed to solve the refugee problem. UNHCR objects to the repatriation of possible political refugees before their claims are carefully screened. The most vulnerable refugees are women and children, who constitute 80 per cent of the refugee population.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Since the dawn of history, wars and disasters have forced people to flee out of fear for their lives abandoning everything--- home, belongings, family and country for an uncertain future in a strange land.

Today there are more than nineteen million (19M) refugees around the world while twenty million people are displaced in their own lands. Their plight is one of the great tragedies of our time. Our guest today heads a major United Nations agency responsible for helping refugees. She's Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Joining me to speak with Mrs. Ogata are Tuyet Nguyen of the United Press International and Pat Orvis of the *Christian Science Monitor*. Mrs. Ogata, welcome to World Chronicle.

LITTLEJOHNS: Madame High Commissioner, the numbers that we've just cited are pretty horrendous. Is there also a considerable increase weekly, monthly in the number of refugees and displaced persons?

OGATA: Unfortunately in the last three years, there has been a great increase because there were large outflows of refugees resulting from conflict with the crisis in northern Iraq, the Horn of Africa, Yugoslavia and just recently, about seven hundred thousand people have fled Burundi. And these are large scale displacements of people crossing borders and we are directly responsible for that.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now how does UNHCR react to these problems as they arise. Suddenly you send in an advance team to assess the situation.

OGATA: Well, yes. Since there has been large emergencies, we have considerably strengthened our emergency response capacities and we do have a team, five teams, five persons each. There are about twenty five persons who can be moved into any situation quickly.

And we have standby arrangements with NGOs and governments, and we do have some stockpiles of goods. So for example to Burundi, to the neighbouring countries, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire we sent already by a large airplane, twenty-eight person emergency team with assessment technicians to assess further needs.

And also we do have field representatives in the region. So they are mobilizing goods and also we have joint arrangements with WFP that WFP will bring them -

LITTLEJOHNS: That's the World Food Program.

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OGATA: World Food Program. So the emergency response capacity has been strengthened I think in the last two years or so.

LITTLEJOHNS: Where is the problem the greatest, which continent - Africa?

OGATA: Africa has some six million people but in Africa there is also potential for solution. In Mozambique for example, we are starting the largest ever repatriation of refugees. Some one point five million Mozambicans who have been -

LITTLEJOHNS: People who fled during the civil war.

OGATA: Fled during the civil war. Over a million in Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Swaziland. They're returning so -

LITTLEJOHNS: Liberia, what about Liberia.

OGATA: Liberians are - well, there is now still - there is some political agreement but they're still fighting.

ORVIS: Mrs. Ogata, you say there are something like forty million dislocated people on the planet and your literature says there are eighty percent - more than eighty percent of these are women and children and even if the women had an average of ten children, that would still leave an awful lot of women enough to populate a good sized city or even a small country. And yet according to your literature as well, it's the men who aren't even there in the refugee camps or at least not in large numbers who get the food aid, get the ration cards, get to say when it's safe to go home and how they'll go home. Is anything being done to equalize?

OGATA: Well, you see you have to realize that we are dealing with cultures, people in different cultures. Like in many of the Asian cultures or southeast Asian, southwest Asia, there's very much of a elder clan type society. And you cannot really change just because they went to refugee camps. You cannot change their social patterns.

ORVIS: Nevertheless, does anyone ask the refugee women themselves what their needs are or -

OGATA: Of course we do and also you see, the fact that there are more women and children reflects the fact that most of them flee conflicts and men are fighting. Men - very often they're left at home fighting. Or they're left sometimes at home trying to keep up their farming and so on.

ORVIS: But that means they're not where the women are. Unprotected and hungry -

OGATA: This is why it is very important to make our program more reflective of the needs of women which we are doing -

ORVIS: One other point, does UNHCR have women field workers -

OGATA: Oh, yes.

ORVIS: Because of this cultural -

OGATA: And I think it's important that men fieldworkers are just as aware of the women needs.

NGUYEN: You have called for preventive measures to curb the flow of refugees worldwide. You are dealing also with the area which deal also with preventive diplomacy. Are you getting into an area that does not belong - probably would not belong to UNHCR?

OGATA: Oh, when you say prevention, I don't mean by stopping people from fleeing but to try to deal with the situation as quickly as possible. For example, if you take Burundi, I hope very much that there will be diplomatic political initiatives that would be effective to stabilize the political situation in Burundi, so that people who have fled to Rwanda and to Tanzania and so on have a chance to return.

NGUYEN: How do you see those ethnic conflicts that will increase in the next few years, how is UNHCR going to cope with that ever increasing conflicts.

OGATA: We cannot I think - I don't think we can change ethnic conflict as such. But for example, in the former Yugoslavia where we have a large field presence, our field officers have been able to maybe moderate the effects of ethnic cleansing or at least help those who were under harassment and so on. We have - I think there's some degree of success but when the fighting gets to a point that people have to flee to saving their lives, we just have to help them.

NGUYEN: The United Nations has been strongly criticized for not really stopping the ethnic cleansing. UNHCR and the peacekeeping operations over there are sometimes incapable of stopping that. What do you think the UN should do now in the next few years for example to really bring an end to something that really is violating humanitarian law.

OGATA: Well violation of humanitarian law should be corrected but you see, it's expecting too much for the United Nations to be able to stop completely a major ethnic conflict or wars. That is too much. I think the United Nations was never built that way. I think it can contain, it can correct, do a lot. But is the United Nations ready to bring in large armies, which means armies from the member states?

ORVIS: Can I come back to one more interesting point about this question of where the eighty percent of the refugees being women and children, maybe I'm on touchy ground here, but there is one subject so taboo that even in the most liberated circles it isn't discussed a great deal publicly and yet as a western woman reading this, it seems to me to go to the very heart of the matter of the fact that the needs and the role

of women in refugee camps are so easily discounted. And that is again according to your literature, many refugee women do not have the materials they need to take care of themselves for that one week every month when women are considered taboo in many cultures.

OGATA: Well, we try. I think our main thrust is really to bring in care and maintenance materials - and does include some materials that are useful for women.

ORVIS: But apparently they effectively have to go into hiding for like a quarter of their life. Who does the work then? Who picks up the slack. Who takes care of the kids and the fields and the flock and - because they had to bear this burden I guess, right? I mean do they kind of sneak around the tents and do it or -

OGATA: Well, I think each woman deals with these things according to their own practice too.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mrs. Ogata, there's been a bit of controversy about economic refugees. How do you address that problem? I mean for example, the Haitians, some of the Haitian refugees were considered to be economic refugees rather than political and I think that you were somewhat critical of the United States for barring these people from coming to this country.

OGATA: There are people who move for economic reasons and there are people who move because of persecution or war.

LITTLEJOHNS: But how can you determine -

OGATA: Well, there are - I think there are two ways of - on the whole you can look at the country of origin and the situation in the country of origin. If there is a coup d'etat, if there is conflict, that country would be in a situation where the refugees are likely to flee. And I think Haiti is in that kind of a situation and in which case, we always make sure that these people fleeing will have a chance to be examined whether their claim for asylum is justified or not. And this is what I have spoken out.

LITTLEJOHNS: Are there other countries other than Haiti where this is a particular problem? Economic refugees.

OGATA: Oh, this is all over Europe. This is a major worry that the European countries have because there are people who are coming from the east, from northern Africa, from central Europe and so on. And you have to remember also, we have to remember that in western Europe there are no immigration windows to address.

So these people although they come for economic reasons would seek asylum. And the European countries have been examining them. But the number has increased so much that the backlog of people who have to be examined has created the large social

problem. And I think dividing economic, those who are seeking economic opportunities and those who are seeking political opportunities or protection is a very important thing.

NGUYEN: On the right of asylum, what about the Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong. They are forced to go home.

OGATA: Most of them have been examined and most of them who are now remaining have been screened out in the sense that they have - many of them have come for economic reasons and those who have been screened out are not received by any other country for resettlement. So they will eventually have to go back.

NGUYEN: All of them, they are what, twenty or twenty five thousand in Hong Kong. To try to bring them back would take years.

OGATA: We will still have to - there will still be a few more years.

NGUYEN: A few more years.

OGATA: But I think this trend is very definitely for those who have been screened out, which means that those who clearly do not qualify being refugees will be going back.

NGUYEN: You know the United States has forcefully repatriated few Haitians. Have you raised your voice against such a practice.

OGATA: I have twice made public statements about my concern about refusing people without examining them.

NGUYEN: But they are nonetheless -

OGATA: Well, what the United States has done is to screen them in the country because the argument is that they risk so much danger by taking off on these small ships. And therefore there is an in-country screening process.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about the people who leave China and try to come to the United States. The so-called illegal immigrants. There was the case of several who died when they arrived on a relatively small leaky boat. Have you been dealing with that problem?

OGATA: They are most likely economic migrants. And we have been consulted by the United States government which wanted to have some of their papers examined by us. We are not direct - we have never really directly become involved in the screening. The US does that. And there was out of a thousand, maybe one person. That kind of a ratio. They are - and they come from a relatively well-off province too.

LITTLEJOHNS: Pat, you have a question.

ORVIS: Dr. Ogata, you name - in your literature there's a stellar list of geniuses and outstanding world people who have been refugees. I think Einstein -

OGATA: Einstein is a refugee. Something we haven't capitalized on.

ORVIS: Yes. And do you find this to be true now and how are they accommodated and what is done for the nurturing of the - is there any time at all or resources to consider nurturing the soul of these -

OGATA: Well, we would like to if we had more money to go in for the education of those who are refugees. But with this large number of refugees very often we can barely manage assuring their security and their daily life, health and food.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mrs. Ogata, child refugees, do you have schools for them?

OGATA: Some places, yes, we do.

LITTLEJOHNS: But not as a general rule.

OGATA: Not everywhere, that is true.

LITTLEJOHNS: How many people are employed in UNHCR.

OGATA: All over the world. I have about three thousand five hundred staff.

LITTLEJOHNS: And your budget?

OGATA: A little over one billion ($1 Billion) the last two years.

LITTLEJOHNS: A little over how much?

OGATA: One billion dollars ($1 Billion).

LITTLEJOHNS: And this money comes mostly from which countries.

OGATA: Oh, the money comes from governments. Ninety five percent are government voluntary contributions. And they come - the large donors are the United States, Nordic countries, Japan and European Community (EC).

NGUYEN: Is there any program of UNHCR that are better funded than others?

OGATA: Oh, yes.

NGUYEN: Can you give us some example please?

OGATA: The repatriation program of Cambodians from Thailand was very well funded. Iraq - the Iraqi Kurdish crisis was well funded. Yugoslavia was well funded up till about the middle of this year but now we are up - a kind of an uphill battle there to get funds. And small - in general we are having difficulties funding the former Soviet Republics, Azerbaijan, Armenia.

NGUYEN: Is this politically related? Let's say the superpowers decide that this problem in that area in that country must be solved first, and they give you the money first to do it - or is this purely humanitarian concerns?

OGATA: There's a lot of humanitarian concerns when the situation is extremely serious. There is compassion aroused in the countries. Yes, I think the chances of getting funds more rapidly is there, but it depends also on where you think - for example if you take Cambodia, I think the Japanese government took the initiative to fund it because it is an area that is very close to themselves. Yugoslavia, the Europeans have taken the initiative in funding. So I think there's a natural area of concern that governments have. Africa, it is a mix. European governments, United States, they're funding. So I think there's a general --- what shall I say, area to which you know that for example if it's a former colony, I would hope that the former colonial power would take more interest. This kind of thing happens yes.

NGUYEN: Some of your field staffers have called for change in UNHCR probably because of the bureaucracy that has been existing for years and working under the cold war. Now the era has passed and they call for change. Not the kind of bureaucrats you have been dealing in the past. I wonder what have you done really to improve the working of the UNHCR to improve the condition of the refugees.

OGATA: That's a difficult question. I don't know where to start. During the cold war the refugee protection work was pretty static. Because people flee from communist countries. They're received in the western countries on the individual basis. They became refugees and resettled in third country so it was a lot of legal work. And then during the colonial independence days, then we needed more people who could work in the field because we had large scale refugees, so a lot of --- required, shall I say, expertise that was legal, but also program managers. Now we have these large scale - whether it is in Yugoslavia or it was in Iraq or Somalia, refugees fleeing into Africa, we need people who can be very logistic specialists. Some even know how to work with the military. The new expertise required. And a lot of emergency specialists. So we are expanding the area of expertise required and I think trying to reduce the what you call bureaucratic work, paperwork. There's just so much paperwork - trying to reduce paperwork. This is an attempt to - and while making sure of accountability.
We need managers too because if you have large operations, we know how, we need people who know how to manage accounting, financial specialists. These are new areas that I'm trying to strengthen.

LITTLEJOHNS: We read from time to time, Madame High Commissioner, that UNHCR has suspended operations in this or that region. How do you determine whether you should suspend and how do you decide when to go back again.

OGATA: Oh, if you're thinking about especially the convoys that are going into Bosnia and so on - the decision is really - you go very much and convoy leader could

decide. But if it's a larger decision of suspending the convoys going through Central Bosnia for example, in the latest case, it came from the Special Representative of the Secretary General in consultation with us.

With UNHCR and even the Secretary General made a decision. But it would be very, I think pragmatism and security assurance are the basis of these decisions. The field people come up with proposals.

LITTLEJOHNS: Doesn't that cause enormous problems because of the refugees themselves?

OGATA: Certainly. This is why we do not want to do that but at the same time, United Nations - whether it is the peacekeeping forces or the UNHCR staff, civilians are now working in war zones.

LITTLEJOHNS: Have you lost many staff -

OGATA: Yes, yes, in Bosnia we have lost ten. In Ethiopia we've lost three persons. I mean we have unfortunately - but we have strengthened, done everything to strengthen our security protection measures.

LITTLEJOHNS: We haven't talked very much about Somalia. Tell us a bit about your operations -

OGATA: My operation in Somalia is really about a million Somali refugees. In Kenya where the largest number are, and then Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen. And they are along the border and we have done what is known, what we call cross-border operation. That is in Kenya, instead of waiting for all the Somalia refugees to cross into Kenya, we have moved into the border areas in Somalia to help them.

Because traditionally you would think that refugees qualify for protection only after they leave the border. But that means they have to spend additional days in hunger and all the weariness to cross. So we went into Somalia to help them inside Somalia. And there were feeding stations and this has facilitated their return too. And we have small projects of resettlement already inside Somalia along the border.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you - go ahead, you'll get a last question.

ORVIS: Mrs. Ogata, I keep coming back to this question of women partly because there's such a large percentage of refugees, partly because I'm a woman and partly because I think they must be very fortunate since there is a such a large percentage of women having a strong voiced woman like yourself to speak for them, but you started to talk about the cultural effects that creates a lot of the problems for women who are coping with most of the problems. I wonder if you could elaborate on that a bit.

OGATA: Well, education for example. In among the Afghan refugees - the most recent ones I have visited, there are schools in camps in Pakistan. Boys and girls separate. But the boys schools, all the boys go. It took a lot of efforts on UNHCR part to encourage the girls to go to school. And we have some schools, girls going to school. The percentage is very low compared to the boys. But left to their own culture, they would not have gone to school. So there are these efforts that one has to make in order to encourage girls to get an education.

ORVIS: Almost a benefit.

OGATA: Maybe so, yes, and compared to the girls in their own country or in some rural Pakistan, maybe they have more chances.

ORVIS: Just one quick follow-up to that, can we assume that refugee women will be on the agenda at Beijing in '95 when this major -

OGATA: I hope so. I have not looked at -

LITTLEJOHNS: What is Beijing in '95. What is happening.

ORVIS: The womens' summit.

OGATA: I would imagine so, yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you have hospitals in your operations and medical doctors.

OGATA: Yes, very often these are run by - in cooperation with ICRC or -

LITTLEJOHNS: The International Committee for the Red Cross.

OGATA: Yes. And Médecins sans Frontier is a very very close operational partner and in many refugee camps they are there and take care of the health part.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about the health of the refugees on the whole. Is it reasonably good? I mean circumstances which --

OGATA: It depends. Some of them come in terrible health conditions. And then since refugees live together in crowded environment that - contagious refugees if there's something that can be contagious so we have to be very careful about the health situation.

NGUYEN: You have been just appointed by the General Assembly for a five year term. I wonder if you have right there something in your head, a priority for UNHCR.

OGATA: Well, I hope that in the five years there will be fewer refugees or that there will be a smaller UNHCR. That's something I hope very much. But at the same time, since I do not have control over the world, cannot exactly promise that.

LITTLEJOHNS: When UNHCR began operations, was that '46?

OGATA: '46 there was another organization but it was 1950.

LITTLEJOHNS: 1950. How many refugees were there at that time?

OGATA: About two million.

LITTLEJOHNS: So it's gone from two million to not more than nineteen million and all these displaced people.

OGATA: And these were mostly people who fled from communist countries.

NGUYEN: And you have received two nobel peace prizes also in the period.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you run into any problems politically? I mean are governments critical of your operations sometimes. Have they tried to prevent you from many things you'd like to do.

OGATA: We always deal with difficult governments because the governments that have refugee problems, whether they're receiving them or sending them are under very difficult conditions.

LITTLEJOHNS: And how do you cope in that kind of situation, because yours is essentially humanitarian --

OGATA: See, protection mandate is a very special one. We have two mandates I would say. One is protection. Protection means that those who flee from persecution or war crossing the national borders, have no state to protect them. So the office protects them. We have to speak on their behalf, vis a vis the government. That is one very important mandate which gives us degree of independence too. And the other one is to solve refugee problems. And if you want to solve the problems you really have to be in consultation with the governments, with the refugees and so on to help. We have to be useful to help solve their fate.

LITTLEJOHNS: In terms of nationality which is the largest group of refugees now?

OGATA: A single group would be Afghans.

LITTLEJOHNS: The single group would be Afghans.

OGATA: There were six million Afghan refugees. More than two million have gone back but still four million is a large group. And also former Yugoslavia taken as a whole is refugees and internal displaced, those whom we're assisting is four million.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mrs. Ogata, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of World Chronicle. Our guest has been Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. She was interviewed by Tuyet Nguyen of the United Press International and Pat Orvis of the Christian Science Monitor.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

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